

Approved For Release 2001/04/23 : CIA-RDP75-00149R000600350019-1

Rusk's Aide Defends CIA In Laos

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(Washington Bureau of The Sun)

Washington, May 24.—The State Department indignantly denied today charges published abroad to the effect that its peace-making efforts in Laos are being sabotaged by the Central Intelligence Agency.

It simultaneously labeled as "untrue" a report published in Vientiane to the effect that it is pressuring King Savang Vatthana and his Premier, Prince Boun Oum, to fire Maj.-Gen. Phoumi Nosavan, the royal Laotian government's Defense Minister and "strong-man."

Meanwhile, Dean Rusk, Secretary of State, delayed a scheduled departure for Seattle to attend a late afternoon conference on "problems in Southeast Asia" that President Kennedy held at the White House and that also involved armed forces representatives.

Conference Called Routine

Pierre Salinger, White House press secretary, insisted that the conference, which lasted about an hour, was "a strictly routine meeting" and "not an emergency" affair.

Lincoln White, chief State Department press officer, said the allegations against the CIA that were published in London are "completely false."

The State Department, he continued, "has set the policy of the [United States] Government in Laos in conjunction with the President and other agencies of the government, including the CIA, are carrying out that policy."

"The functions of the CIA in Laos," he added, "are to collect intelligence essential to the interests of the United States government and it is doing that."

Allegations Repeated

The British allegations were similar to some published in an American weekly more than a month ago. The American charges were to the effect that Washington, G. Brown, United States Ambassador at Vientiane, frequently finds himself in competition with CIA agents, who encourage Phoumi to keep fighting Washington's as well as CIA's efforts to blend Laos into a coalition government.

The charges of CIA "interference" were repeated in the House of Commons yesterday.

The British charges were

ing last Friday between W. Averell Harriman, Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs, and Thao Khampan, Laotian Ambassador here.

White said the royal Laotian Government was "strongly urged" to negotiate "promptly and realistically" with its neutralist and pro-Communist foes to form with them a coalition regime in accordance with an East-West agreement worked out at Geneva last year.

Ouster Report Denied

But it is "untrue," he added, that, as the Vientiane report said, Harriman had set Phoumi's ouster from the present government at Vientiane as the price for continuance of United States economic and military assistance.

It is understood, however, that Harriman strove to impress upon the Laotian Ambassador Washington's displeasure over Phoumi's public conduct in recent weeks, including statements representing the Geneva agreement as pro-Communist and his stand as purely anti-Communist.

He recently reasserted his readiness to accept Prince Souvanna Phouma, an avowed neutralist, as Premier of the proposed coalition but only, he added, if Souvanna provides evidence that he will not thereafter favor the coalition's pro-Communist wing, which his half-brother, Prince Souphanouvong, would head.

Key Posts Barred

Phoumi, who is vice premier as well as Defense Minister, has been particularly insistent that Souphanouvong's faction in the projected coalition regime be denied Cabinet posts entailing control of the army and police.

The Geneva plan, however, is represented here as one that would allot those posts to Souvanna's neutralist faction.

It is also represented as one that would keep the forces now operating under Phoumi's command intact and apart from those of Prince Souphanouvong's and Prince Souvanna's rebel factions until Laos has been rid of North Vietnamese contingents and an agreement to integrate all Laotian forces can be reached.

Criticisms Reported

Harriman was also reported to have said that Phoumi had not made himself any more readily available for coalition negotiations than did Prince Souvanna, whom Washington

backs as a candidate for Laos' premiership, remained in Paris

until May 18 and, stopping in Burma, announced a further postponement of his return to Laos.

In addition, Kong Le, whom the Communists sometimes bill as commander of all Laotian rebel forces and, at others, as commander only of those not subject to Prince Souphanouvong's direction, has been out of Laos, too.

A 28-year-old paratrooper with a captaincy when he led a military revolt at Vientiane in August, 1960, Kong Le, who now ranks as a general on the rebel side, left Peking for Moscow on April 23 and on May 16 arrived in East Berlin by way of Prague.

Harriman and his aides have therefore, slight grounds for singling Phoumi out for criticism on the travel count. They are understood, however, to be critical of him on military grounds.

He insisted on reinforcing the royal Laotian Government's Nam Tha garrison early this month in disregard of contentions by his American military advisers that such an isolated position could not be held against determined rebel attack. Then, also contrary to American advice, the local command at Nam Tha disposed its force of about 4,500 men in a way, it is alleged here, that virtually invited the defeat that followed.

Support Troops Sent

The rest of the garrison set off a train of events culminating in President Kennedy's May 16 announcement that he had ordered United States forces into Thailand to supplement the Thai forces, regarding that country's border with Laos.

The move was still under way at 3 P.M. yesterday, according to a State Department announcement that the plane, was scheduled to drive to Friendship Airport to board a C-130 plane for Seattle, where it would speak and hold a press conference tomorrow.

Later, the meeting was "a long time ago," Asked if he had been included in the list of President Kennedy's appointments for today, he said, "No, but only 50 percent of the meetings that go on here are for the president."

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